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Do Farmers Want the Federal Government to Help Them Deal with Farm Problems?

This introduction to viewpoints is one of a series prepared for members of rural discussion groups through the cooperation of the Extension Service and other agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture. It is not intended to direct attention to any particular point of view or conclusion. Instead, it is intended to be read by members of discussion groups in advance of consideration of the topic so as to indicate some of the topic's discussion possibilities.

The following pages contain examples of expressions of opinion from different members of different groups. No statement contained herein should be construed as an official expression of the Department of Agriculture. Similar statements are available on other topics, forming a series of 14. Discussion Series B, intended primarily for leaders of groups and the most interested members, has also been prepared on the same topics.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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This pamphlet is the second in Discussion Series A, a series of brief introductions to widely-held viewpoints on the 14 topics listed below. Discussion Series B, also available, covers the same topics at greater length. Discussion Series A is intended for reading by members of discussion groups in advance of group meetings. Discussion Series B is intended for use by chairman of forums and discussion groups, speakers, and group members who wish to do further reading.

1. What is the Chief Cause of the Farm Depression?
2. Do Farmers Want the Federal Government to Help Them Deal With Farm Problems?
3. Should American Agriculture Seek Recovery of World Markets or Arrange to Live at Home?
4. What Kind of Foreign Trade Policies do American Farmers Want? In Peace Time? In War Time?
5. What kind of an Industrial Policy is Best for Agriculture?
6. The Farmer and the Consumer of Farm Products—What, If Any, Are Their Responsibilities to One Another?
7. Do Farmers Want High Tariffs on Farm Products? On Industrial Products?
8. Should Farm Benefit Payments Be Abolished?
9. Farm Prices—How Are They Made?
10. What Kind of Land Prices Would Be Best for Agriculture? For the Nation as a Whole?
11. Will Crop Adjustment Be Necessary or Desirable in Years to Come?
12. What Possibilities and Limitations do Farmers in this County Face in Seeking a Better Balance in Farm Production?
13. What Objectives Are Desirable for Farming as a Business? As a Way of Life?
14. What Should Farmers Seek to Accomplish Through Organization?

Two pamphlets, intended primarily for the assistance of leaders of rural discussion groups and forums, are now available:

1. Discussion: A Brief Guide to Methods.
2. How to Organize and Conduct County Forums.

Do Farmers Want the Federal Government to Help Them Deal With Farm Problems?

HOW much freedom of action the individual should have, and how much action governmental units should take, are questions that face all people at all times. Certainly, they are questions which the American people have considered from the very beginning of the Nation to the present day. In a time of economic crisis, these questions are asked more frequently and discussed more intensively than at other times. During recent years a new interest in them has been apparent among the farm population, which, facing some unusual difficulties, has naturally thought a great deal about the various ways and means of improving its situation.

What Are Your Answers?

- 1. Should Farmers Rely Solely Upon Themselves Through Voluntary Action Without Trying to Use Any Governmental Means to Solve Their Problems?**
- 2. What Should Farmers Expect of Their State Governments in Dealing With Farm Problems?**
- 3. What Activities Do Farmers Wish the Federal Government to Carry on?**
- 4. Should Farmers Rely on Their Own Cooperation Without Governmental Assistance to Solve Their Problems?**
- 5. Do the New Conditions of Recent Years Make Necessary Any New Federal Activities?**

Some Pros and Cons

I

“The thing for farmers to do is to exercise the old fashioned self-reliance of their forefathers instead of looking to governments for help. They are forgetting the ancient wisdom that what farmers can do for themselves is of far more importance than anything the government can possibly do.

“The things that happen close to home are the most important of all. Pay more attention to your own back yard, mind your own business, and you will be better off. Improve the practices on your own

farm, and you gain more than by considering what is happening a thousand miles away.

"Farmers have been all too ready to try to imitate the ways of industrial corporations and organized labor. Agriculture is a way of life as well as an industry. If you try to regulate agriculture, you destroy it. Farming can't be done that way. It must always remain mainly an individualistic enterprise, or at least the affair of a family.

"Farmers make their contribution to the nation's life by preserving and building up the family, not by monetary rewards, and continuous efforts to get higher prices. The thing to do is to go back to the time when farmers were on a more self-sufficing basis, and were also much happier in the bargain.

"Farmers also have their own organizations on a voluntary basis. It is to these they should look for the assistance they need, rather than to any state or national government."

II

"Farmers should expect only very limited services of the government. Let our state and federal governments be good 'policemen', and that is all that is needed. Governments should preserve order, and prevent injury to persons and property, but no further service to farmers is needed.

"The twentieth man always needs some restraints put upon him, or he will injure or degrade his fellows. It should be the function of government to watch out for the gravest abuses, the most evident exploitation, and to prevent and eliminate them.

"That government is best that governs least. This theory was in the minds of many of the founders of the nation. They believed that private enterprise was the most important, and that all public enterprise should be of the most limited nature.

"It is this idea that needs to be rediscovered, and acted upon today. If we are too weak to take care of most of our own affairs in our own way, we shall also soon be unable to guard our own liberties. And liberties of peoples are precious things in these days. Most of the people of the world have less liberty than we in this nation have.

"We must avoid the mistakes of establishing a highly centralized government. Local and state governments should be the strongest units. When once the localities give up functions to the state, experience teaches that the localities never regain those functions again. It is the same way with the relation of the states to the federal government. Once the states rely on the federal government for services or activities, they give up some of their own strength."

III

"Governments should be and must be more active than they have been in the past. We have new conditions. We are not the kind of a Nation we were a hundred years ago. Life is more complex, and seems to be growing vastly more so, with more and more machines, radio, quick transportation, and mass production.

"It is useless to think that we can govern ourselves today by the same rules as we did a hundred years ago. We have to recognize that all of the people are being affected with what happens in particular sections. When more than ten million people became unemployed, it was found that the localities and the states could not even feed them. All of the people were affected, and all of the people had to act about it. There was only one way whereby all of the people could act—and that was through the federal government.

"And so it is with farm problems. If farmers really want a higher proportion of the national income, if they want better marketing conditions, if they want to have a balanced agriculture in relation to consumer demand, then they must authorize effective government action aimed at these ends. It has been demonstrated that things won't just happen in the interest of agriculture. Some things have to be arranged so that there is a chance that they can happen.

"If farmers do not demand a much more active government, they will be left behind in the race. Industry and labor are demanding and receiving certain protection and services of governments. Should farmers fold their arms and sit by? We can't go back to the old days of more limited government, even if we wished to. We are in a day when we have to have quick and decisive action, if farmers are to function effectively in the nation's life."

More About Governmental Farm Policy

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Wallace, Henry A. *NEW FRONTIERS.* New York, Reynal and Hitchcock, 1934. Paper, \$1.00.

CONTEMPORARY LEGISLATIVE AND BANKING PROBLEMS. New York, American Institute of Banking, 1934. \$1.50.

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Kolb, J. H. *MEETING THE FARM CRISIS.* Chicago, American Library Association, 1933. 25 cents.

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